

# DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 24, No. 6

June 15, 1956

Whole No. 285

## Upton Sinclair, Last of the Dime Novelists

By Ralph Adimari



No. 1 of True Blue.

True Blue was written by Upton Sinclair in his early days.  
(From the LeBlanc collection)



## Upton Sinclair, Last of the Dime Novelists

By Ralph Adimari

In this estimate of the career of this Socialist I shall not write about his radical life since it does not properly belong to the Dime Novel.

Upton Beall Sinclair Jr., as he was known while a nickel novelist during his college years, was born September 20, 1878 in Baltimore. His father was also named Upton Beall Sinclair and his mother was Priscilla nee Harden. Our Upton came from an old American family whose males were mostly naval warriors seeing duty in the American Wars from the Revolution to the Civil War. But the family in this war chose the Confederate cause. As a result it was impoverished and they decided to go to New York City, the Mecca of all ambitious Americans in the 2nd half of the 19th Century.

It is claimed his family went to New York in 1888 and this may be somewhat accurate since the New York directory first lists Upton Sinclair for its 1889/90 issue. According to the directories the Sinclairs lived in various locations mainly on the West side from 19th Street to Claremont Avenue. Upton Jr. is first listed as an author living with his father in 1901/2 at 100 W. 92d Street, a street that seemed to have a special charm for them for they lived on it off and

on from about 1889-90 to about 1903.

For reasons best known to himself Sinclair is quiet about when his father and mother departed this life but the N. Y. C. directory for 1906/7 lists Upton (Sr.) as agent living at 523 W. 121 Street and then the following year lists Priscilla Sinclair widow of Upton so it shows he died sometime in 1907. Priscilla is listed to about 1920 but when she died is a mystery to me. Upton is listed living with his mother thru 1909/10 and available information claims he started living permanently in California about 1911 on to this very day where he no doubt dreams of many things. His two letters to me reveal neither whether he is a happy man serene and calm nor the opposite.

It is said that the first effort he made in serious writing was a short story sent to the Argosy, first called Golden Argosy a magazine for boys published in New York in tabloid form. For this story said to be in one source about birds while the other source says it was called "Tommy Junior the Second" which "apparently" was published "it appears" in the Argosy for July 1895. At this time the magazine had been reduced in size to become the shape of mag-

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azines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *True Story*, *True Detective*, etc. of today. Later it became a pulp pure and simple.

So far I have shown up few contradictions in the Sinclair nickel novel writing career. But from now on I must take charge. Sinclair claims that in his anonymous article *Confessions of a Young Author* 1902 "I have written dime novels by the ream . . ." But strictly speaking he never did since the only ones known to me that sold for a dime were stories in *Columbia Library* published for a dime each by Street and Smith 1899-1900. These paper backs were mainly reprints of the earlier weeklies and larger in format. They were the same size as the *Medal and Magnet Libraries*. However why contradict the author who after all should have the last say about what he thinks of his own life and career? Who are we to impose on him?

Meanwhile he was going to the College of the City of New York at 23rd St. and Lexington Avenue and writing at the same time. It is not known definitely when he entered City College but it seems to have been 1892.

Altho he started off with short stories Sinclair began writing jokes and short humorous sketches which were much in demand and paid well. While writing for *Argosy* he got to meet its editor Matthew Whitley Jr., whom he describes as a "genial little gentleman". But just about the time he graduated from City College in 1897 Sinclair was to meet one of the best friends he had made in one of the editors of the firm of Street & Smith, Henry Harrison Lewis. Not only was Lewis an important editor but an author of considerable nickel novel importance as well as naval articles which are in various periodicals at the turn of the Century circa 1897-1902.

Lewis asked Sinclair to continue a series of stories for *Army and Navy Weekly* which had started the same year he graduated from City College, 1897. This weekly, which was colored

and patterned after the very famous weekly *Tip Top* 1896 containing the celebrated Frank Merriwell stories, had stories one week about West Point and another about Annapolis. For the West Point stories the hero was Mark Mallory and for the Annapolis ones he was Clif Faraday. Ensign Clark Fitch was the stock name for the Annapolis stories while Lieut. Frederick Garrison was the stock name for the West Point stories.

Sinclair says that Lewis was writing the *Army and Navy Weekly* by himself and that he persuaded him to do the West Point adventures so as to lift some of the burden from Lewis' shoulders who had so many tasks at Street & Smith. Later on Sinclair took over the entire writing job on *Army and Navy Weekly* which was changed to *Half Holiday* and which ended in 1898. In various statements made either by Sinclair or his biographers it is asserted that all the Lieut. Frederick Garrison (West Point) are his. But since the *Army and Navy Weekly* was started in 1897 with West Point stories in it just before Sinclair took over this is clearly not true—Lewis started both the West Point and Annapolis stories himself and then personally himself let his young protegee continue them some time later in 1897. Only Stylistic analysis can prove when this happened, for no matter what is written it can be definitely proved who wrote what if we have prior writing by the authors in question.

Not only is there confusion with *Army and Navy Weekly* but also *True Blue*, a weekly started in 1898 and which ended in 1899. But from all evidence gathered in various ways I can say that Sinclair wrote all the *Half Holiday* and *True Blue* stories. Joseph Gaer in 1935 edited a *Literary Research Project* which states that Sinclair wrote *Starry Flag Library*. Douglas Wells was the stock name used by Street and Smith for its authorship.

In the meantime Sinclair was writing for Munsey but whether for



others in these 3 years 1898-1901 is not known. He was very busy with what he had to do for Street and Smith and this gave him little time for other diversions. When the Spanish American War started, he was ordered to get both Clif Faraday and Mark Mallory out of Annapolis and West Point and put them in the middle of the fighting.

And because of the tremendous excitement of Spanish events Sinclair was busy "killing Spaniards" for the next two years. In 1899 Columbia Library was born but it didn't last long giving up in 1903 with 44 numbers. Here his earlier stories from True Blue and Starry Flag were reprinted. There was a playwright with the name of Clyde Fitch at this time and this is possibly where the name Clark Fitch came from. Many nom de plumes were formed in this manner.

Sinclair was so busy that in these years 1897-1901 he began to get help to produce his writings. Had 2 stenographers working while he himself wrote even on Sundays. For three years at least he reached the grand total of \$70 per week. He did all this even though he was studying at Columbia University. But here the contradictions come up again: Sinclair says in 1932, "Strange as it may seem, I actually enjoyed the work while I was doing it. Not merely was I earning a living and putting away a little money; I had a sense of fun. . . . It is significant that the stories pleased their public only so long as they pleased their author."

Yet Floyd Dell (1927) claims that the young author was in despair because he had to write nickel novels when in reality his heart was set on poetry. And the author himself in an anonymous book *Journal of Arthur Stirling* cries "I have not one single beautiful memory in life." This was in 1902 just about when he was giving up nickel and pulp writing. But he contradicts even this outburst in 1917, when in an interview he confesses "since the age of twenty, I have written exclusively in the cause

of human welfare . . . I was able to say . . . that in those eighteen years I have never written a line I did not believe."

Of course Sinclair did not refer to his nickel novels written in 1898 when he was 20 but he did mean that they were darn good so to speak and that he was not ashamed of them. But there is no definite statement made by Sinclair that puts a definite and final verdict on his work as a nickel and pulp novelist. In one place he jeers at them; in another he is grateful to them.

Sinclair is not clear about when he started to write. In 1923? he says he supported himself since 1893 with his pen. But in 1932 he says he wrote "pot boilers" from 1894 to 1901. In 1902 he says he wrote "since my early college days" or say about 1892. I have found no definite evidence that he wrote before 1895, the year claimed for his first published short story in *The Argosy*. Unfortunately the New York Public Library does not have a complete set of the *Argosy* so I could not confirm even his first published effort.

But Sinclair may have started to write but not for publication in 1893 and then when his first efforts were published in 1895 he burst out in a rash of work. In *Public Opinion* reviewing his masterpiece *The Jungle*, 1906 it is claimed he wrote from 1893 on 1700 tabulated jokes. He also wrote poetry for I have discovered one in *Truth* for 1897, July 31 signed Upton B. Sinclair Jr. The title was "A Song of the Summer Seashore" whose epic line contains among others:

"While I sip my beer on Coney's pier."

He certainly could write poetry when he wanted to long before the urge had come over him 5 years later as Floyd Dell says.

(To be continued)

#### NEWSY NEWS

By Ralph F. Cummings  
Fisherville, Mass.

Rev. Don L. Steinhauer, Eli Messier



and a Redmen friend by the name of Hartley Roe of Worcester, Mass. were here on April 30th. We had a fine time all around, on novels and what not.

Ernest Beique, Sr. (Swappers and Collectors Brotherhood, Box 624, Saundersville, Mass. died at his home Saturday night, May 5th, 1956. Age 61. He was the publisher of the Swappers & Collectors Brotherhood Magazine, Swappers Collectors Directory, and a member of the Happy Hours Brotherhood No. 188. I have known him for over 30 years, and at that time he had a little magazine, about 3 x 3½ inches, 10 or 12 pages. God Bless him, always.

Col. Charles D. Randolph says he's always been interested in the Buffalo Bill Stories, and he keeps and treasures them all. He likes what they are made up of, such as Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, California Joe, Doc Carver and others.

Ken Daggett says many times he has almost weeped when he'd think of all the old novels and story papers he had passed by when he was only interested in old letters. Says he could have gotten lots of them just for the hauling of them away, in the old days.

James C. Morris, an old time member of the old 20's and 30's, had just got out of the hospital April 13th, as he had went in early in March. His wife was still in the hospital, especially at that time. Should you wish to write to Jim, I'm sure he would be very glad to hear from you. His address is R. F. D. No. 17, Fairmont, W. Va.

Carl Linville, 972 Windsor St., Cincinnati 6, Ohio, is back in the hospital again, so won't you fellows drop him a few lines of cheer. He hasn't felt so good for quite a while. The old trouble has been acting up some, so let's all send him well wishes, so he'll get out of the hospital very soon, so he can be able to get some of the good old summer days when they do get here.

Bob Smeltzer says he has a lump on his shoulder that seems to be

growing, and he may have to go to a hospital to find out what it is and have it taken off if there is a way of getting it off without too much trouble.

So we are all rootin' for you, Bob, also Carl too.

Joe Katz says the hotels down in Florida don't figure on it ever being cold. They have no heating systems, so it gets pretty uncomfortable. Now take New England—that's still the loveliest part of the country, as winter is winter, and everybody is prepared for it, and no one can match it in the summer. (Ed. note—New England is a swell place to live, but when it's cold and miserable, oh boy, try and beat it.)

Wm. M. Burns says he is feeling very much better than he did a while back. He also says what a winter they had up there. Well Bill, I guess we received the companion to it down this way.

### EXCHANGE COLUMN

Wanted—Work and Win #237, 293, 439, Fame and Fortune, #27, 181, Nick Carter Weekly #280, Beadles Dime Library #102, 477, Secret Service #189, 221, Boys of America #35. W. R. Johnson, 416 Wheeler St., Ardmore, Oklahoma.

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Don Steinhauer

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## MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 202 C. L. Messecar, Box 951, Tigard, Oregon. (New Member)  
 203 Albert E. Johnson, 2901 27th St., Sacramento 18, Cal. (Former member)  
 91 Roy E. Swanstrom, 922 West County Road, RD 1, St. Paul 13, Minn.  
 (New address)

## FOR SALE

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 Price \$18.00  
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**Ralph F. Cummings**

**Fisherville, Mass.**



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